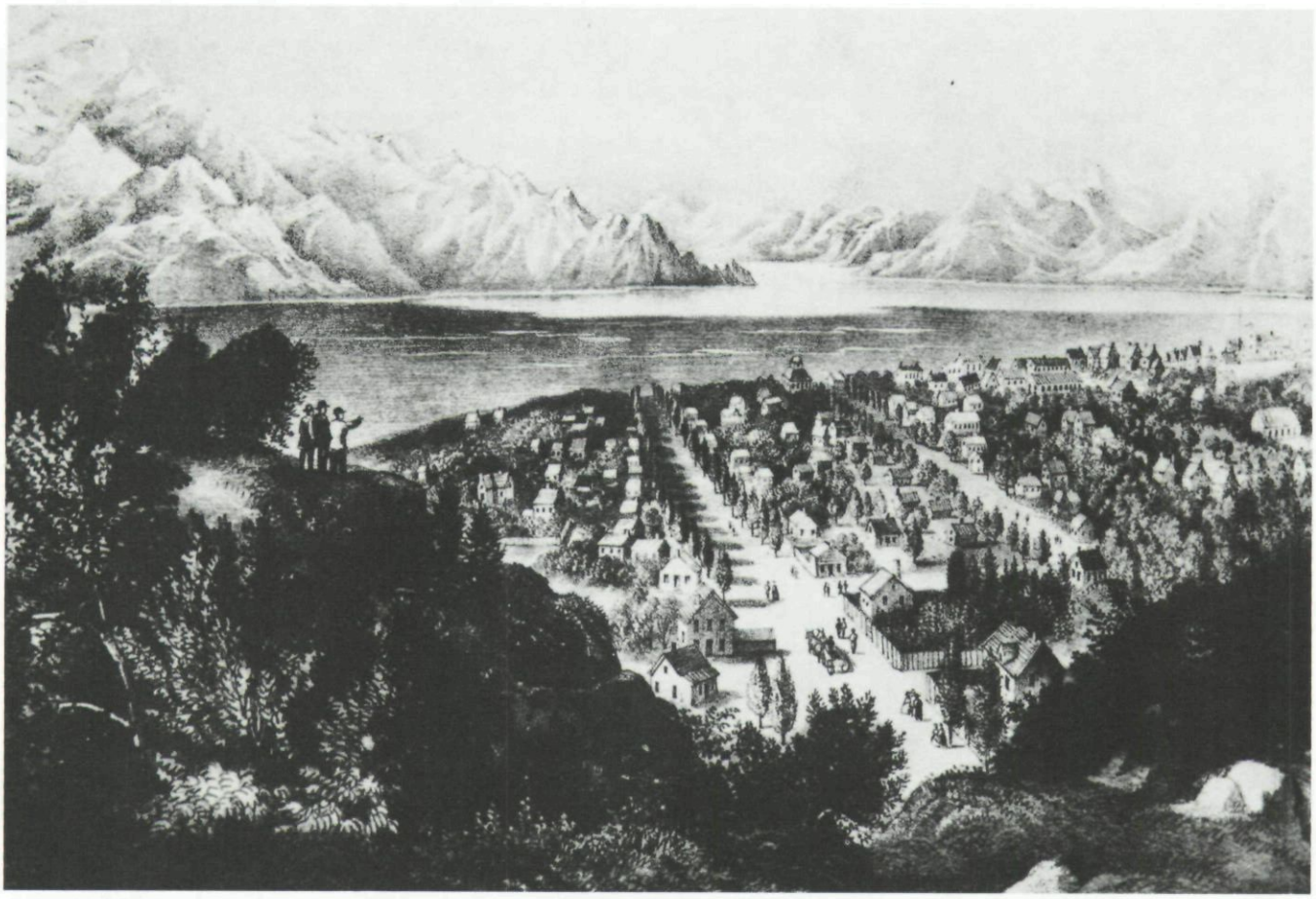


A sketch of Salt Lake City done in 1852 by representatives of Currier and Ives depicts the city in bucolic fashion. The picture has little relation to reality, as the city was relocated 20 miles west to a scenic Great Salt Lake reminiscent of a lake in the Alps. (Photos, illustrations, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, UT)

Geography and Settlement in the Intermountain West

Creating an American Mecca

Richard H. Jackson

Introduction

THE geography and settlement of the Intermountain West differed in several important aspects from the geography and settlement of the Eastern Seaboard and Mississippi Valley. Geographically the Intermountain West is generally drier and colder (but has a complex mosaic of micro-climates with wide variations in precipitation and temperature); more rugged (yet there are large level basins within its confines); and less accessible. The effect of these geographical differences on the actual settlement of the West was profound. The earliest explorers and exploiters of the region sought out riches whose high value/weight ratio offset the cost of overcoming the region's isolation. Settlers interested in expanding the Mississippi River Valley agrarian settlement model into the West viewed the Intermountain Region as primarily a barrier to be overcome because of its perceived ruggedness and aridity.

For the Mormons (nickname for the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints), the isolation and harshness of the Intermountain West, rather than any of its riches, were the most positive aspect of its geography. Organized in upstate New York in 1830, the Mormons established settlements in Ohio and Missouri with farms, businesses, temples, churches, and schools, which they were forced to abandon as a result of mob violence. Fleeing to Illinois, they created a new

community of nearly 15,000 along the Mississippi River. Once again they constructed a temple, schools, and churches. As they transformed the city of Nauvoo from a few log houses to a bustling center of substantial brick homes and businesses, they were once again faced with persecution, which culminated in Joseph Smith's assassination in 1840. After Smith's death, the Mormons intensified their search for a new location. The Intermountain West, Oregon, and California were among the primary destinations considered. The isolation and harshness of the Intermountain Region that deterred other potential agrarian settlers were viewed by the Mormon leaders as favorable geographic characteristics that would protect them from competition and conflict with other settlers. In the words of one Mormon leader,

> The worst places in the land we can probably get, and we must develop them. If we were to find a good country, how long would it be before the wicked would want it, and seek to strip us of our possessions? . . . thank God for the wilderness, as we thanked him for these mighty ramparts and those extensive plains which we had to cross when we came here. We thanked him for them, because a mob could not come, as they did from Carthage, and hail them to prison and destroy them as they did then. When we came here I thanked God for the isolation of these mountains; I thanked him for the grandeur of the hills and bulwarks which he had reared around us. I thanked him for the deserts and waste places of this land. . . .[1]

This perception of the Intermountain West seems to have been widely held by the Mormons, as evidenced by Brigham Young's letter to President James K. Polk a year before the first Mormons arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. Young stated that as a result of illegal actions of mobs, the Mormons were about to begin

> . . . a journey which we design shall end in a location west of the Rocky Mountains, and within the basin of the Great Salt Lake, or Bear River valley, as soon as circumstances shall permit, believing that to be a point where a good living will require hard labor, and consequently will be coveted by no other people. . . .[2]

The Mormon assessment of the geography of the Intermountain Region that led them to conclude that it was a harsh land but one in which they could create their new homeland was based on the reports of trappers, explorers, and erstwhile immigrant recruiters trying to attract settlers to the Oregon or California territories. Sources from which the Mormons obtained information in the 1842-1846 period as they considered alternative locations included the writings of John C. Frémont about the Great Salt Lake Valley and Bear River, those of Lansford W. Hastings relating real or perceived differences between Oregon and California, reprints from a variety of newspapers of accounts of the Rocky Mountain Region by trappers, and visits with a wide range of individuals including Lansford Hastings and various trappers. The reports of the region were often contradictory, with trappers such as Ashley quoted in newspapers as stating of the Intermountain West that

> the sterility of the country, generally, is almost incredible. . . . the proportion of arrable (*sic*) land . . . is comparatively small . . . and no country visited by Gen. Ashley, or of which he obtained satisfactory information, offers inducements to civilized people, sufficient to justify an expectation of permanent settlements.[3]

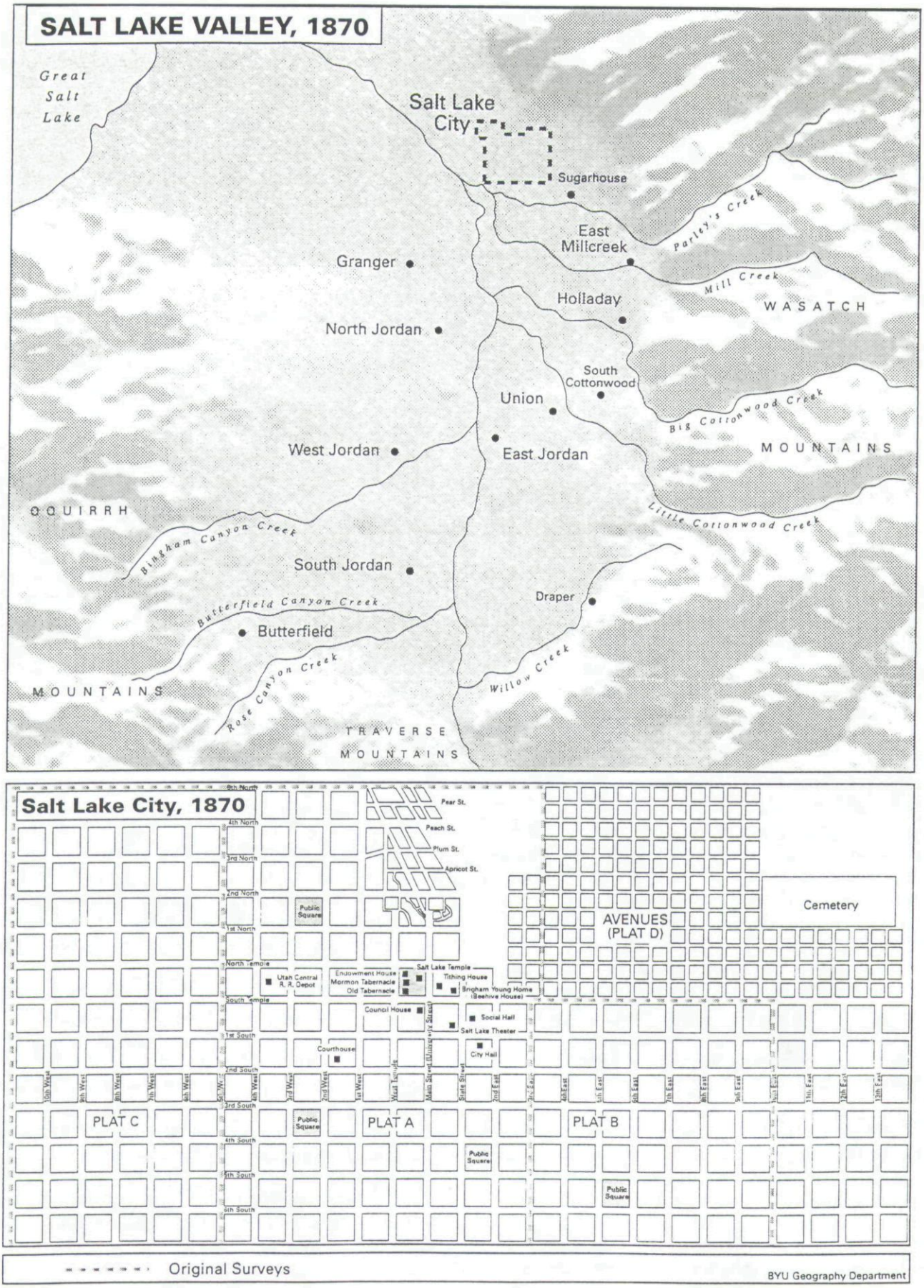
Other trappers were less pessimistic, and the explorer Fremont suggested that the region of the Bear Lake and Salt Lake Valley could support permanent communities, if only as way stations for migrants to the better areas of the West Coast.

> Taking leave at this point of the waters of the Bear river, and the geographical basin which encloses the system of rivers and creeks which belong to the Great Salt Lake, . . . I can say of it in general terms that the bottoms of this river (Bear) and of some of the creeks which I saw, form a natural resting and recruiting station for travellers, now and in all time to come. The bottoms are extensive; water is excellent; timber sufficient; the soil good, and well adapted to such an elevated region. A military post, and a civilized settlement would be of great value here and cattle and horses would do well where grass and salt so much abound.[4]

The Mormon leaders selected the Salt Lake Valley as their primary destination largely because of Fremont's favorable reports, arriving in the Great Salt Lake Valley in July of 1847.

The actual selection of a site for their new city reflected a combination of serendipity and the geography of the region. First, the Mormons happened to come one year after the ill-fated Donner party had cut their way down the narrow canyon that became Emigration Canyon. While the Mormons had to improve the rough trail the Donner party had blazed, it debauched into the fertile eastern margins of the Great Salt Lake Valley. Second, the streams flowing into the Great Salt Lake from the eastern side of the valley, unlike the large Colorado, Bear, or Provo rivers, were small and easily diverted for irrigation.

The Mormon pioneers reported that the soil along the streams "was of most excellent quality," the streams from the mountains entered about "every 1 or 2 miles,"



The new city established by the Mormons lay at the base of the Rocky Mountains, with smaller lots (avenues) and irregularly shaped lots reflecting the hilly northeastern edge of the city.

with "water excellent," and the flood plains of the streams and the lower part of the valley were covered with a "great variety of green grass," which was "very luxuriant." The pioneers reported that along City Creek as they crossed the valley "the wheat grass grows 6 or 7 feet high, many different kinds of grass appear, some being 10 or 12 feet high." The site where they finally stopped was reached after "wading thro' thick grass for some distance" to "a place bare enough for a camping ground, the grass being only knee deep, but very thick."[5] The location was described as having an "excessive dry climate," but a thundershower on July 24 was greeted with thanksgiving as "it was the general opinion that it never rained in the valley during the summer season."[6] The pioneers concluded that the heat was not excessive because of its low humidity and that the breeze from the mountains cooled the air at night.

In short, the valley possessed "a beautiful dry and salubrious climate and exhilerating (*sic*) atmosphere," which was the "most favored spot for health on the globe," even "surpassing any place that can be found on the coast."[7] Crops apparently could not survive on the occasional thundershowers, but the pioneers simply diverted water from City Creek onto the adjacent flood plain, marking the beginning of irrigation practices that would later reshape so much of Western geography. The lateness of the season prompted the pioneers to devote the bulk of their efforts the next few days to planting potatoes, corn, and other crops to try to meet their needs during the coming winter.

Since the Great Salt Lake Valley apparently met Brigham Young's requirements of isolation and demand for hard work to wrest a livelihood from the land, the Pioneer Party set out to locate a site for what would become their "Mecca," Salt Lake City. Exploring parties compared their campsite on City Creek with other locations in the Salt Lake Valley and concluded that there was no better place for a community. On July 28, 1847, only four days after Young arrived in the valley, the Pioneer Party met in the evening to formalize a location for their new city. These were men with two decades or more of experience of establishing settlements on the American frontier. They had seen one of them, Nauvoo, Illinois, grow to some 15,000 people in a few short years. With this in mind, it was imperative to Young that the site selected for their central city have geographic characteristics that would accommodate similar growth in the years to come. Meeting east of the campsite, the party heard the reports of the exploring groups who concluded that "they had found no place that looks so well as this place." Brigham agreed and stated that "he knew that this was the place for the city fore (*sic*) he had seen it before, and that we were now standing on the South east corner of the Temple Block. . . . A voat (*sic*) was then taken on the subject and all voted that this be the place to stop."[8]

With the decision to locate in the Great Salt Lake Valley reified by the Pioneer Party, the Mormons laid out a city to be the center of their new home in the Great Basin. The city plan followed in general terms the plans for a "City of Zion" proposed by the Mormon founder, Joseph Smith, Jr. His City of Zion plan was based on a self-sufficient agrarian model in which each family had a ½-acre city lot to grow a garden, build their home, etc. All of the barns were to be outside of the city, and the city was to be one square mile in area surrounded by barns, larger fields for crops, etc. Smith's vision was that 15,000 to 20,000 people could occupy his city, then new ones could be established beyond the lands cultivated by that city.

Young's plan for Salt Lake City followed the spirit of Smith's City of Zion plan. The blocks were the same size (10 acres), the central block was reserved for a temple, and each family had a large city lot with farms beyond the blocks reserved for residences. Unlike Smith's plan, Great Salt Lake City was to have lots of 1¼ acres so families could keep a cow, chickens, and other essential subsistence-related livestock on their city lots. Like Smith's plan, Young's vision of Great Salt Lake City was of an agrarian community consisting of micro-farms in the town and large-scale farming beyond the city limits. Like Smith, Young made no provision for any commercial activity, but he did make all the streets as wide as the widest boulevards in Smith's plan.

The greatest departure from the utopian City of Zion plan of the prophet Joseph Smith was in the size of the city. The pioneers surveyed 135 lots, doubling the one-mile-square city Smith had proposed. The following year, 63 more lots were surveyed, and in 1849 another 85 were added. While the density of houses was lower in Young's new city than in Smith's plan, the surveying of more than four square miles into lots paved the way for future growth of the city into a true capital of Mormonism. The wide streets, large blocks, and quasi-rural appearance of a community in which every home carried out some agriculture on its house lot were to become important parts of the image of the "City of the Saints" that emerged.

A month after the first Mormon pioneers entered the valley, the Mormons formally adopted as the name of their new city the name of one of the most prominent geographic features in the region: It was to be called "the Great Salt Lake City; of the Great Basin; North America. . . ."[9] Having chosen the name, the Mormons set out to build a community that would overshadow the curious nature of the Great Salt Lake. Rapid immigration prompted growth unrivaled in most agricultural communities in the Mississippi Valley frontier. By the end of 1847, a total of 1,637 migrants had arrived in the new city, followed by 2,398 the following year. Within four years, 9,741 migrants had come to the new Mormon Mecca, literally creating the City of the Saints. With natural increase, the total population of the Mormon communities in the Great Basin reached an estimated 11,418

Earliest photos illustrated the wide streets of the incipient city, as in this sketch from 1853.

in 1850, and surged to an estimated 47,046 by 1860 and to over 97,000 by 1870. Not all of these settled in Great Salt Lake City, but by 1848 it was the largest city between the Missouri frontier and the West Coast. Its continued growth and location approximately midway between the western edge of the expanding Eastern frontier and the West Coast made it an obvious way station for migrants passing through to California, and the isolation sought by Young was effectively ended.

Views of the City of the Saints

The discovery of gold in California in 1849 and the growing migration to Oregon led to increased government interest in the Intermountain West, prompting a number of government exploring parties to pass through the Mormon Mecca, and the demands of both Western businesses and Eastern nationalists fostered interest in a transcontinental railroad, adding further visitors to the Mormon city. The curiosity of finding a large settlement *cum* city in the "wilderness" of the Intermountain Region encouraged most of these to record their descriptions of the Mormon Mecca.

To the numbers visiting the City of the Saints en route to somewhere else must be added the Mormon faithful who came to settle, and the journalists or professional travellers who came specifically to write about life among the perceived American aberration — the Mormons. The significance of the City of the Saints for the believers is obvious, but the host of non-Mormon writers who came specifically to comment upon the community illustrates its rapid emergence as a landmark in the West. These views changed over time as the city grew, but they had surprising commonalities that reflected the unique Mormon aspects of the city and how it was adapted to the geography of the region.

The views of the various visitors reflected their motivations. For all, however, their most important responses showed their relief at finally arriving at some semblance of civilization after spending weeks or months crossing the plains and mountains en route to the Great Basin. But this attitude changed after the railroad made "tourism" to the West possible, and thus the following evaluation of views of the City of the Saints will end with the arrival of the railroad. For all visitors prior to this time, the overland journey by foot, horseback, ox team, or stagecoach made the prospect of a "city" doubly important.

For the Mormon migrant, of course, reaching the City of the Saints was both a time for thankfulness at the end of the long journey that may have begun in a European port and a time for rejoicing at joining with other believers in their American Utopia. In words which are almost identical to those of hundreds of other Mormon migrants in the pre-rail era, one Mormon migrant reported in 1848,

> In a moment release comes to the weary traveller; he sees at once the only isolated spot of civilized rest for or within 1000 miles in any direction. A sudden feeling of joy, grandure (*sic*) and gratitude suddenly filled each heart, which brought a sudden deathlike stillness, well fitted for a large range of the mind. Then suddenly every heart and tongue was busy in rendering praises to the beautiful land of rest immediately in view, embracing the most beautiful climate and most productive soil, yet known by any of us.[10]

A pioneer arriving in September of 1847 provided more detail on the new settlement proper and his under-

standing of the local geography and the West in general:

> The Fort [the pioneer company built an adobe fort upon arrival] contains 40 acres of land surrounded with houses made of sundried brick built after the Spanish fashion [adobe] on three sides and wood houses on the other. We went immediately to work to prepare to build us houses. The Fort, not being large enough to contain all of the inhabitants we had to enlarge it. Many built of sundried brick, others of lumber. They have to [haul] lumber for 6 to 16 miles.[11]

The same diarist noted in November that the soil was "as good as need be," the "water first-rate and climate very healthy — not one person sick to my knowledge." He concluded that "everything looks pleasing with the exception of timber, which is scarce. Which caused many of the Saints to murmur."[12] The concern for the Saints over timber for fuel and construction and the necessity for adobe in construction become understandable, with the nearest timber a day's journey away, and that in the mountains where it was difficult to access. The description of adobe construction as "Spanish" style indicates that the Mormons were aware that they had adapted their houses from the Spanish settlements in the Santa Fe area.

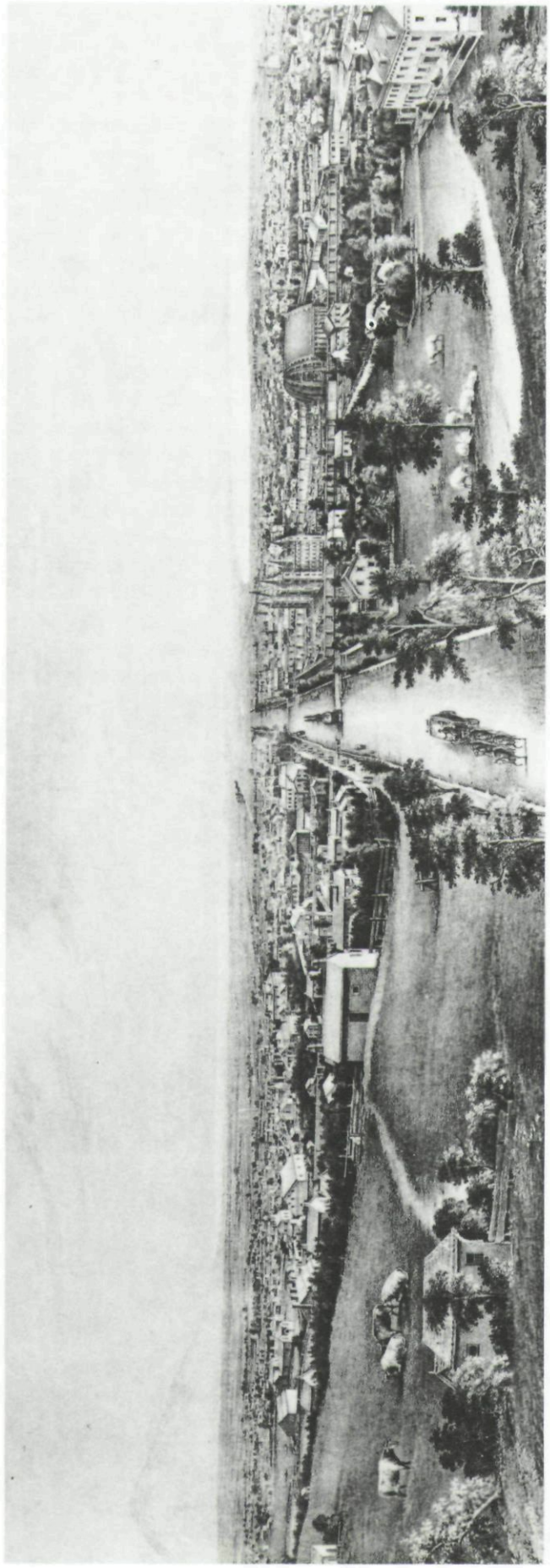
The lack of timber was not the only problem created by the geography of the site chosen for the City of the Saints. As noted earlier, the pioneer company was surprised by a thundershower because they thought it didn't rain in the summer in the Salt Lake Valley. Likewise, unfamiliarity with the climate made the first winter in their new home uncomfortable. Commented one pioneer in April 1848 as the snow on their roofs began to melt, "Weather cold and unpleasant. Our houses being flat roofed, they leaked very bad, which makes it very unpleasant."[13]

Such difficulties could be resolved after the first full year in the valley, for experience was the best teacher available to the Mormon pioneers. In spite of limited timber and leaky roofs, the consensus among most of the nearly 2,000 people in the new settlement by 1848 was that it was a "paradise as it will comparatively seem to one who may travel the dreary road that leads to it."[14]

The timing of the arriving Mormon migrants and their experience with American frontier settlements also colored their view of the city. The majority crossed the plains in the summer, arriving in the late summer or early fall when the city was verdant and promising. For those Mormon migrants who had the misfortune to be caught in an early winter, or those who left the jumping-off point for the overland journey at Council Bluffs late, snow made the city appear rather drab. European migrants from large cities were additionally struck by the raw and unfinished nature of an American frontier "city." One woman commented in 1856:

> When first we arrived in the city to us everything looked dreary and cold. The streets was (*sic*) all covered with snow. . . . At that time the city was not built up very much the houses was Scatering

An illustration of Salt Lake City in 1851 demonstrates the wide streets, fences, and trees described by the government surveyor, Stansbury.



(*sic*) to me it seemed a very lonesome place. . . . I had been living eleven years in the city of London before I left England and to me it seemed a very loanly (*sic*) place I said to my old friend Annie Thorn if this is Salt L. City what must it be like to live in the country. . . .[15]

For American migrants more familiar with frontier communities, Great Salt Lake City seemed impressive. The description of Captain Howard Stansbury, who came to the valley in the fall of 1849 to conduct a survey of the Great Salt Lake, acknowledges the Mormon accomplishment while describing elements that were later included in most other descriptions:

> A city has been laid out upon a magnificent scale, being nearly four miles in length and three in breadth; the streets at right angles with each other, eight rods or 132 feet wide, with sidewalks of 20 feet; the blocks 40 rods square divided into eight lots, each of which contains an acre and a quarter of ground. . . . Through the city itself flows an unfailing stream of pure sweet water, which, by an ingenious mode of irrigation, is made to traverse each side of every street, whence it is led into every garden spot, spreading life, verdure, and beauty over what was heretofore a barren waste.
>
> The city was estimated to contain about 8,000 inhabitants and was divided into numerous wards, each, at the time of our visit, enclosed by a substantial fence, for the protection of the young crops; as time and leisure will permit, these will be removed and each lot enclosed by itself, as with us. The houses are built principally of adobe or sun dried brick, which, when well covered with a tight projecting roof, make warm, comfortable dwellings, presenting a very neat appearance. . . .
>
> Upon a square appropriated to the public buildings, an immense shed had been erected upon posts, which was capable of containing 3,000 persons. It was called "the bowery" and served as a temporary place of worship until the construction of the great temple.[16]

Stansbury's description of the fledgling community included the principal elements mentioned by other observers. The grandiose scale of the city struck all observers. The extremely wide streets may have seemed unnecessary for the agricultural village that was initially Great Salt Lake City, but the advantages of making each lot a mini-farm supplied with life-giving water was obvious to all. The need for irrigation, and the simple

A view of Salt Lake City in 1867 claims to be sketched from photographs. It shows the walled Temple Square, and the tabernacle under construction, but the temple illustrated was only a foundation at this time.

means by which it was provided to each lot, struck all observers as a remarkable adjustment to the arid summers of the region. Likewise, the use of adobe for construction offset the limited supply of timber in the valley, conserving it for rafters, door and window frames, wagons, and other implements for which there was no local substitute. Finally, Stansbury's mention of the central square and the bowery indicated the importance of the city as a symbol of Mormonism — a Mormon Mecca. A structure ample enough to hold large congregations was necessary so that Mormons could gather to hear their prophet speak. The bowery was quickly replaced by a series of even more spacious permanent structures known as tabernacles, culminating in the distinctive Tabernacle on Temple Square completed in 1867. Seating 10,000 people, it has been in use for the Church's semiannual conferences ever since. The "great temple" mentioned by Stansbury in 1849 was but a dream at the time, not being completed until 1893. Begun in 1853 on the "public square" mentioned by Stansbury, however, its rising walls also became a part of the descriptions of the City of the Saints, for the public square described by Stansbury was known as "Temple Square" to the Mormons from the earliest days of their arrival in the valley in 1847.

Arriving Mormon migrants invariably included all of the elements of Stansbury's more complete description of the city, and they changed remarkably little in the decades following his visit. William Searce wrote back to his children in Council Bluffs in 1849 that

> . . . the city has the appearance of a garden more than a city it is enclosed in wards by a fence & all in cultivation it contains at present nineteen wards & each ward nine blocks & each block [ward] 72 lots each lot one acre & a quarter & the streets eight rods wide. . . .[17]

With the rigid grid pattern of the incipient city, including its square lots, blocks, and irrigated gardens covered in their diaries, the Mormon pioneers commented on other aspects of the geography of their new home. One remarked,

> And here I would mention one singular fact (At least to us English Folks) this is the extreme clearness of the air enabling us to see objects at a very great distance. . . . I have frequently noticed different objects, which I imagine I should have little trouble reaching on foot, and on enquiring the distance, have been told they were perhaps 20 or 30 miles distant.[18]

Commenting on the building materials used in the architecture of Salt Lake City, the Mormon migrants invariably mentioned the use of adobe. Noted one, "the houses at first looked odd being built of adobys [*sic*] or sun dried brick truly it is unlike anything I ever before had seen."[19] Another remarked that "the city is well watered from the mountain Streams & lies mostly level their buildings are much better than I expected to find they are all built of adobies or Sun dried brick of a light blue color & when laid in a wall they present a handsome appearance."[20] Some of the more loquacious Mormon migrants looked beyond the curiosity of adobe and described the structures themselves. Newly arrived

An 1868 view of Salt Lake City reveals the large lots, fences, gardens, young trees, and both adobe houses and crude lumber outbuildings.

An illustration from *Harper's Weekly* in the mid-1860s emphasizes the wide streets, shade trees, and small adobe homes of Salt Lake City.

from Sweden, John Lingren stated that, "The houses in general were built of sunburned brick and adobes, one story, some one-and-a-half, with two or three rooms. The city was not much shaded with trees at this time."[21]

The combination of houses, gardens, and geographical setting between the Rocky Mountains and the Great Salt Lake led Mormon and non-Mormon observers to conclude that even though it was still a village, the City of the Saints was indeed remarkable for its beauty. A decade after its founding, a diligent diarist remarked,

> Great Salt Lake City is one of the prettiest cities I know of anywhere. It is situated at the base of the mountains, in a very large valley of the same name, and about twenty miles back from the Great Salt Lake. The streets all very regular, running north and south and east and west, and very wide. There are shade trees in abundance, and water running on each side of each street, fed by a large stream from the mountains and properly divided off. There is a large adobe wall 10 feet high which nearly surrounds it; the buildings are also all built of adobe.[22]

The relative amount of shade provided after only a decade of occupation reflects Brigham Young's admonitions to the Mormons to plant fruit and shade trees, which resulted in each lot having numerous trees, most for fruit.

In spite of the uniqueness of the new city, some Mormon migrants were underwhelmed by its size and appearance. An 1863 arrival stated,

> Arrived in the church pasture on Sept. 5, 1863. [All arriving immigrant trains stopped in the church pasture so their teams could graze] The next day we looked over the city we had dreamed about. The picture in our mind of the city, and the real city, failed to have any resemblance. We nevertheless gave it but very little thought. The city itself was nothing to us. . . .[23]

For the Mormon migrant, the new city, irrespective of its geographic setting or physical appearance, was the end of a long journey. The City of the Saints was their new home, a new Mormon Mecca in the American West. Their prophet had so designated Salt Lake City, and they thus saw the city through the eye of faith.

For the non-Mormon visitor (all non-Mormons are referred to as Gentiles by the Mormons) passing through Salt Lake City, there was no religious significance unless they were hostile to the Mormons in general. The California Gold Rush brought many people from the frontier the Mormons had fled, and many were so imbued with hatred for the Mormons that they could find nothing good in their new city, instead focusing on their heresy in claiming a prophet and new revelation and the "abominable" practice of polygamy. More reflective visitors recognized the bias inherent in some of these views. The most articulate of the Gentile visitors, Sir Richard Burton warned,

> Parenthetically, I must here warn the reader that in Gt. S. L. City there are three distinct opinions concerning, three several reasons for, and three dia-

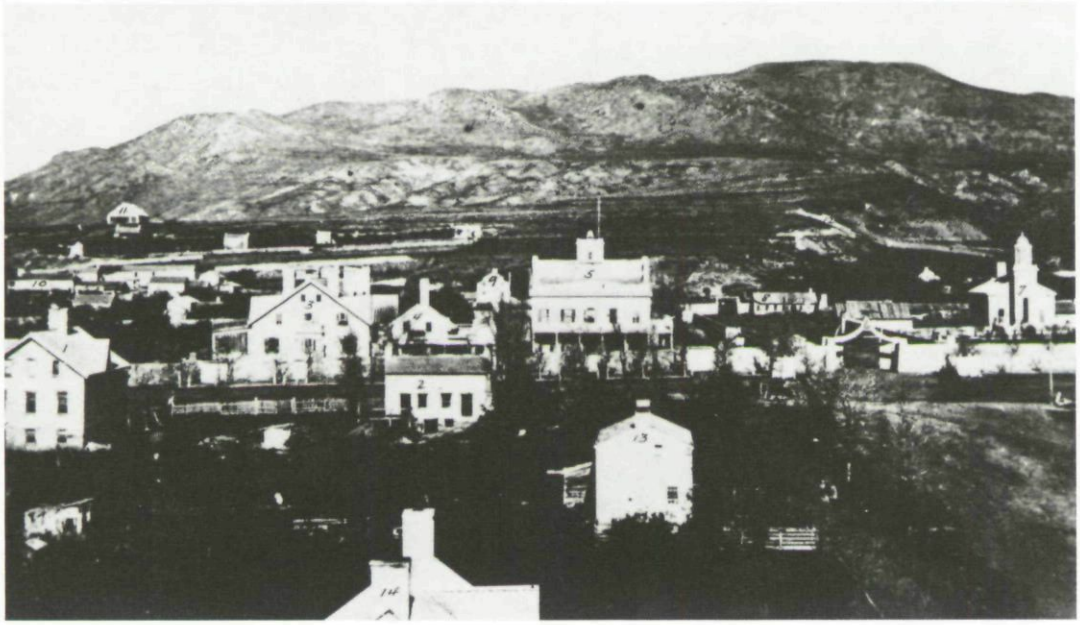


Photo of Young's homes and offices (labeled 3, 4, and 5) and other large adobe structures east of Temple Square in Salt Lake City, 1862.

> metrically different accounts of, everything that happens, viz. that of the Mormons, which is invariably one-sided; that of the Gentiles, which is sometimes fair and just; and that of the anti-Mormons which is always prejudiced and violent.[24]

Most of the Gentile descriptions mirror those of the Mormons when discussing the size of the city, the building materials, irrigation, the clear air, the beautiful mountains, and the relief at finding a community in the middle of the uninhabited West. Where the prejudiced opinions noted by Burton enter in were in discussions of Young, the role of the Church in individual lives, and condemning polygamy. Other comments emphasize the appearance of the city, separating the beliefs of the religion from the accomplishment in building the city. One reporter noted that it was not for him to discuss religious theories, but that the Mormons had indeed made significant progress in agriculture, mining, and provision of physical comforts to the residents of the city. In fact, he concluded, "ancient Ninevah alone, of all the cities of the world, could rival theirs in beauty."[25] The author describes "the city of the prophet" as dotted with "Houses half hid amid dark green foliage," whose trees are principally "peach and apple, with a burden of fruit I have never seen equalled." Of the houses themselves, he reported that they "are almost all of large size, brick or *adobe.*" The homes were "usually one story, but varying to two as with us." He noted that some of the homes were "plastered and painted — an additional beauty."[26]

Like their Mormon counterparts, the Gentiles responded with joy upon leaving the canyons of the Rocky Mountains and gaining their first glimpse of the Salt Lake Valley and the City of the Saints in the distance. In 1852 a visitor noted that,

> Salt Lake Valley is the great feature in this part of the world; the tired traveler as he emerges from the dark mountain gorges into the open valley is ready to hold up both hands and exclaim "How beautiful!"[27]

Another commented in 1856 that they emerged suddenly into the

> . . . prospect of the long-wished-for valley. I do not know what may be the feeling of emigrants who have left to come hither, and look, for the first time, upon their Sion [*sic*] and Promised land. I recollect my own well: instinctively I rushed up a small eminence on the right, and then turned and gazed. I said nothing, but in my heart shouted "Hosanna! Hosanna!"[28]

Closer observation of the city resulted in clear and concise description of the Mormon capital. The author notes the wide streets, the adobe, the irrigation, the trees and gardens, but concludes, "Architecturally, the city is nothing; few houses are over two stories and many of one only: style there is none; it should be added there are no 'follies'."[29] The author did comment on the large painted house of Brigham Young, and the fact that the foundations of a substantial temple had been laid, but complained that the ten-foot wall around temple square would obscure the temple when it was completed.

Other Gentiles compared the City of the Saints to towns of the Midwest. In 1852, a California migrant said, "The city is quite an ordinary looking place; may compare with the country towns of Illinois and Indiana or Missouri."[30] He did remark that while adobe buildings were common, there were some frame structures, and "the courthouse and one or two other buildings are of burnt brick." The result was a city that "is clean, snug and cozy; the people plain and very common kind of

folks."[31] In spite of the author's general conclusion that the Mormon Mecca was an ordinary place, he could not fail to rhapsodize about the City of the Saints in terms that foreshadowed the future growth and role of the 20th-century city:

> Like Moses, Brigham has led his people into a glorious land; a land desirable in almost every point of view; a land for flocks and herds, for grain, vegetables and fruit, a half-way house between the Atlantic and Pacific; a store house for the mountain region north, south, east and west; a Palmyra in the wilderness. For beauty and comfort it has no rival and no equal in all this broad land.[32]

By the 1850s, scheduled stage lines brought correspondents from major newspapers such as *Harper's Weekly* and *The Atlantic Monthly* who reported the minutiae of the city, including its broad outlines reported by all observers, but extending to each individual business, religious, or government structure. Noting that "the buildings throughout the entire territory are, almost without exception, of adobe," one 1859 correspondent concluded that its color was "more pleasing to the eye than the reddish hue of the adobes of New Mexico or the buff tinge" of those in California. In describing each of the major structures in the city, he remarked with some disdain on the mansion occupied by Young saying it was "a spacious two-storied building, in the style of the Yankee-Grecian villas which infest New England towns, with piazzas supported by Doric columns, and a cupola which is surmounted by a beehive. . . ." [the beehive is a Mormon symbol for industry widely used on church structures].[33] The author describes in detail Temple Square, with the old tabernacle seating 3,000, the bowery for summer, the Endowment House where sacred ceremonies were performed before the temple was completed, the foundation of the Temple, the county courthouse nearing completion, and the two-story sandstone Council House used by the state government until the capital was temporarily moved south to Fillmore.

The growing population of the city combined to promote development of an erstwhile commercial district on the streets immediately south of Temple Square. A "company of gold-diggers" in 1849 reported that there were no hotels, beer shops, barber shop, grocery or other store apparent to the visitor. Finding that there were in fact such businesses as blacksmiths, dressmakers, tailors, and so forth, he concluded that "they needed no sign, nor had they the time to paint or erect one, for they were crowded with business." He also noted that every businessman or woman must also "cultivate the land or die."[34] Within the next decade, these incipient merchants had created more substantial businesses, including a hotel for travelers. After describing the businesses in detail, Richard Burton concluded in 1861 that "The stores, I may remark, are far superior, in all points, to the shops in an English country town that is not a regular watering place."[35] By 1869 when the final spike was driven in the transcontinental railroad, the City of the Saints was even more impressive. The tabernacle was completed, the walls of the temple were visible, the Social Hall and Brigham Young's homes and the Church Office dominated the block east of the temple block. To the south, east, and west of these two blocks, the substantial homes of other Mormon leaders competed for

Photo of Salt Lake City Main Street in the late 1850s. Many of the small adobe buildings began as houses.

By the late 1860s, the most visible evidence of the growth of Salt Lake City was the tabernacle, which loomed over the city proper, and the temple walls, which were still only a few feet above the ground.

space with the business structures of Gentile and Mormon merchants. Great Salt Lake City had become simply Salt Lake City by action of the city government in 1866, apparently since visitors would recognize its "greatness" without reminder.

In two decades the Mormons had created a city in the wilderness, capital of a host of Mormon settlements, the largest city in the Intermountain West. The coming of the railroad merely reinforced its role as the Mormon Mecca, and the financial, commercial, and religious capital of the region. As we approach the sesquicentennial of the founding of the City of the Saints in 1997, the conclusions of early observers seem prescient. As one noted in 1849,

> This territory, state, or, as some term it "Mormon Empire", may justly be considered as one of the greatest prodigies of the age, and, in comparison with its age, the most gigantic of all republics in existence, being only its second year since the first seed of cultivation was planted, or the first civilized habitation commenced. If these people were such thieves and robbers as their enemies represented them in the States, I must think they have greatly reformed in the point of industry since coming to the mountains.[36]

The subsequent growth of the city, the expansion of irrigation, the boom in mining after the railroad, and government spending in the 20th century have all contributed to obscuring the accomplishment of the Mormons in creating a city in unfavorable geographic conditions. Present visitors see only another American urban center, albeit one in which the center remains as a symbol of its religious founders. The government explorer Stansbury penned a few sentences in 1849 that succinctly recount why the geography of the region is so important in measuring the Mormon accomplishment in creating the City of the Saints:

> In this young and progressive country of ours, where cities grow up in a day, and states spring into existence in a year, the successful planting of a colony, where the natural advantages have been such as to hold out the promise of adequate reward to the projectors, would have excited no surprise; but the success of an enterprise under circumstances so at variance with all our preconceived ideas of its probability, may well be considered as one of the most remarkable incidents of the present age.[37]

In retrospect it may not have been "one of the most remarkable incidents" of the frontier era of the West, but the Mormon achievement in creating a city in the wilderness certainly reflects how people's perception of the geography of the region shaped its use. The Mormon cities and towns are vivid reminders that each place takes on the personality of its occupants as they shape the environment to meet their needs.

NOTES

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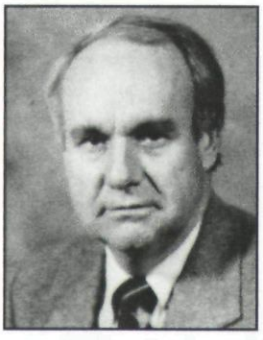
BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Information on the Mormon settlement of the West is abundant. The Mormons believe it is important for individuals and organizations to keep records, plus curiosity about the Mormon Empire focused attention on Salt Lake City by non-Mormons. There are several major archives of information related to Salt Lake City and the Mormons, the most important being that in the Mormon Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City. The Utah State Historical Society in Salt Lake City also has an extensive collection, as do the libraries of the University of Utah, Brigham Young University, and Utah State University. The Daughters of the Utah Pioneers in Salt Lake City have some manuscripts, but they are not readily available. Outside of Utah, important collections are found in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California; in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, California, and in the Coe Collection, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut. All of the manuscript volumes referred to in this article are found in the Church Historical Department, the Utah Historical Society, or Brigham Young University Library.

Aside from the published material, which is voluminous, there are numerous manuscripts of individual Mormon and non-Mormon individuals involved in settling Salt Lake City or passing through it. The most important of these aside from individual diaries and journals is the Journal History of the Church, 1830-1993. This is a series of chronologically organized scrapbooks covering each day from the organization of the church in 1830 to the present. It was not begun until the 1880s, but it has copied into it the diaries of Brigham Young, minutes of meetings, etc., from the earliest days of the Church. Mormon newspapers, especially the *Millennial Star* published for the Saints in England, include numerous accounts by contemporary observers of the Mormons.

The Journal of Discourses is a particularly valuable source, as it is a collection of the public sermons of Mormon Church leaders and represents their view of what the Mormons were trying to accomplish in the arid West.



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